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Having published this book, I know I shall be accused of denigrating both the biblical work of the gospel minister, and the man himself. Indeed, I knew it before I began. But I didn't agree with it then, and I don't agree with it now. Yet, if such a critique of an unscriptural title really has undermined what many regard as 'the ministry', then something is seriously wrong with what we think of as 'the ministry'. And the sooner we find it out the better. In the 16th century, men like Thomas Cartwright and Robert Browne came to realise that the warrant to preach does not depend on a magistrate's licence, and they had the courage to destroy the noxious bits of paper which pretended to make a man into a minister. We must show the same courage and the same spirit in our day. If an elder's authority depends on the invention of an office, on Humpty Dumpty's misuse of biblical words, or on the use of a title, we ought to recognise where we are – and the consequences of it. To accommodate the words of the Independent, Henry Jacob: A teacher in Christ's church has a far 'better original' than calling him 'Pastor'; or ought to have!¹ Of course, we must honour all men to whom honour is due (Rom. 13:7). In particular, as I have repeatedly stressed, we should 'respect' our elders 'who work hard among [us], who are over [us] in the Lord and who admonish [us]', and we should 'hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work' (1 Thess. 5:12-13), but this does not mean we should give them a title. While we must not undervalue the gifts of Christ to his church, pastor-teachers among them, neither must we make little popes of them! Or big!

'Just a minute! In this book, you have written off thousands of good men and fine churches down the centuries, leave alone many today. Can it be that all these men and all these churches have been so wrong? How is it that God has so signally blessed such a system if it is unscriptural – as you claim?'

Let me briefly reply. Let us assume that God has 'signally blessed' this system, and is still signally blessing it today – though

¹ See my *Battle*.

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it might take some proving – such an argument would mean the end of all discussion of, say, infant baptism or Arminianism. In fact, such an argument would *justify* both infant baptism and Arminianism! May I suggest that we stick to the excellent Reformed mantra – *sola Scriptura* – and judge and weigh every doctrine and practice, not by God’s providence, but by his revealed word?

The truth is, those who *have* examined Scripture, and are persuaded that the present system is biblical, have nothing to fear from my book. I wish all such God’s blessing. Go on with the system, my brothers and sisters, and hold it until God, through his Spirit and word, shows you otherwise. Meanwhile, I would be grateful if you would write to me and set out your view according to Scripture.

But to those who are in a system that they have simply grown up with and adopted by default – search the Scriptures, I say, be Bereans (Acts 17:11). That is all I ask. I, at least, am sure that the present system is a sad falling away from Scripture.

So... what would we gain if we got back to the New Testament in this matter? At least nine things:

1. We would recover the biblical meaning of certain vital words. In this area, at least, we would put an end to Humpty Dumpty’s mischief.
2. We would stop breaking Christ’s command against the use of titles. This would be no small gain. Obedience to Christ is no trifling matter.
3. Contrary to the notion which drove the Fathers, when one man is elevated to an unbiblical position in the church, truth is threatened, not defended. To get back to Scripture in this area would strengthen, not weaken, the church.
4. We would recover the biblical concept of recognising (and using – see point 7, below) different gifts among believers. Thus the church would be greatly enriched instead of being impoverished. Every believer would mature,² being helped to obey the apostle’s

² Some would say ‘could’ or ‘should’ mature. I let the ‘would’ stand.

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command to ‘grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’ (2 Pet. 3:18).

5. A major battle would be won in the constant war against glorying in men. Let the world glory or boast in men. God forbid that we should. ‘To him [God] be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen’ (Eph. 3:21). ‘He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord’ (1 Cor. 1:31; 2 Cor. 10:17, AV).

6. The church would be better equipped to thrive in times of persecution, or attacks upon the gospel by false teachers. And there is no shortage of the latter! I fear that we in the west may have to pass through a time of persecution. Is it not a fact that persecutors often focus their attack on – they imprison, kill – the leaders of the churches? If this should happen to us, many believers, I suspect, would be utterly bereft. But under the New Testament system, the depth and breadth of spirituality among the believers would stand them in good stead, and better help them face the loss of their stated teachers. If the enemy does come in like a flood, he would have a far more difficult task on his hands than that which confronts him under the present system – he would have to unearth and subvert several elders, not just one man, ‘the pastor’. The fact is, he would have to subvert whole churches, not just one man.

Let me illustrate. It would be too much of a digression to pursue the point, but I believe Satan has exploited the seminary system of ministerial training. I am not saying a word against proper study and preparation for those who teach and preach (but whether this demands a seminary is open to question) – far from it – but I note the way so often, down the years, the source (the seminary) has been poisoned, with the newly-educated ministers then taking that poison out to the churches. With the passing of sufficient time, which theological seminary has remained true to its basis?³ And are the changes always above board? I do not think so. Lloyd-Jones:

³ Take as just one example, the changes in New England over the past 250 years. See also Lloyd-Jones: ‘Protestant’ pp356-375. The point can be broadened. Lloyd-Jones knew that the Fathers had quickly corrupted the gospel with Greek philosophy, and this had continued down through the Middle Ages. Sadly, the Reformers left the way of preparation for the

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One thinks of professors of theology telling their students: ‘Now this is the real truth in this matter as discovered by scholarship; but do not preach it yet – the people are not in a position to receive it. You must introduce this carefully and slowly’. This has happened many times during the past 100 years.⁴

A word to the wise?

7. We would recover ‘the whole-body ministry’ – so often a missing factor in the churches today; that is, where every member is engaged in the work of the ministry. As I have spelled out, its absence arises from ignorance of, or neglect of, the priesthood of all believers. How have we got to this sad state of affairs? I am convinced the pastor system has a lot to answer for, and the only cure is a return to Scripture. And quick! I am convinced that the recovery and reinstatement of the biblical priesthood of all believers, which leads to the whole-body ministry in the churches of Christ, is one of the great needs of the hour. Christopher Hill got it nearly right: ‘The lesson of history is perhaps that it would be nice to [know]... [but] nicer still if knowledge led to action’.⁵ I say *nearly* right because for the believer, as I have just indicated, there is no choice. He must act. It is not merely *nicer*. I agree with the Digger radical, Gerrard Winstanley, in this at least, when he said: ‘Action is the life of all, and if you do not act you do nothing’.⁶ Above all, how about the words of the Lord Christ: ‘Now that you know these things, you will be blessed [truly happy] if you do them’ (John 13:17)?

ministry unaltered; they ‘did not deal in a fundamental manner with this matter’. The Puritans, too, kept to the old paths. And Lloyd-Jones warned against it, and did what he could to put a stop to it (Eveson: ‘Theological’ pp86-87). It is not without significance that the John Owen Centre of the London Theological Seminary (which seminary Lloyd-Jones did so much to encourage) now offers courses for pastors to prepare for ThM degrees at Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia, citing J.Gresham Machen. Eveson pointed out that Lloyd-Jones dissented from Machen over this very issue: ‘For Lloyd-Jones, [Machen’s view] was an entirely wrong approach’. See also Eveson: ‘Ministerial’ pp176-196.

⁴ Lloyd-Jones: *Basis* p41, published in 1962.

⁵ Hill: *Nation* p283.

⁶ Hill: *Nation* pp135-136.

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8. A recovery of the New Testament pattern of church life, would afford biblical relief to those men who are in ‘pastoral office’ and who are inwardly suffering by it. Right at the start I admitted that some ‘pastors’ would be hurt by my words. In attempted mitigation, I wrote as follows, putting it in bold type: ***I am not talking about particular individuals, but about what I consider to be an invented office – or, at the very least, a serious distortion of the New Testament.*** I repeat it here. I do not want to hurt anybody, or rub salt in any wounds. But that, in a way, is the point, and why I *have* written. I fear that giving a man a title, setting him apart from other elders, and moving him even further away from the rest of the church members, is disobedience to Christ as he has made his mind known to us in Scripture, and, as a result, carries very serious consequences, both for the church *and for the man himself*. I think Christ’s order in his church – elders, in plurality and in parity – is a huge, essential bastion, aid and support for the elders themselves, and for the good of the church at large. I think singularity and presidency – unless it becomes a dictatorship (which would be an abomination, indeed) – leave a man highly vulnerable to tremendous hurt to himself, or to the church, or to both. That, in part, is why I have published.

I am convinced that if we could recover the New Testament position on this subject, many men might be released from the burden of trying to maintain an unbiblical position, and, therefore, feel they have to master an overwhelming number of tasks – far too many for one mere man to cope with. Indeed, there is evidence to show that some believers are turning away from the traditional way of support through ‘the pastor’, and, instead, looking to the counsellor, the psychiatrist and the psychologist, to medicos of one sort and another, in an attempt to find *spiritual* comfort and consolation. I believe that it is not unknown for ‘the pastor’ to realise this, and thus be made to feel even more vulnerable, if not threatened. In a futile attempt to run even faster in order to keep up, perhaps some are trying to take on these extra roles in addition to all the other tasks they have been allotted, thus tightening the vortex in which they find themselves. If the church could recover the biblical doctrine *and practice* of the priesthood of all believers, it would give all-round relief – both to the beleaguered ‘pastor’ and

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to the misguided members. And more than relief. The gain, as I have explained, would be immense.

Some ‘pastors’ might be tempted to take a different way out of the trap in which they find themselves. Conscious of the erosion of their ‘power’, sensitive to their self-perceived inadequacy, in an attempt to restore the former glory of the office of ‘the pastor’, some might be enticed by what they see going on in an increasing number of sections of the evangelical and Reformed world. They might be tempted to bring in the sacramental which leads to the sacerdotal. I have given plenty of evidence to show the rising trend to these twin errors – both among infant baptisers and Baptists.⁷ Who knows if this retrograde drive has not been fuelled, in part, by the desire to heighten the office of ‘the pastor’, to allow ‘the pastor’ to once again reach the top of the pile? The contemporary interest in the Fathers will do nothing to put a stop to this process.

If there is any truth in what I have said on this matter, surely here we have a classic case where the return to Scripture would bring healing, solace and scriptural protection to many. If so, it might be that some of those who have been hurt by my words will go on to take the medicine I have offered, and so find a measure of relief from the burden they have long struggled to bear, but have not dared to name.

And now we come to the final point – point 9, the climax of my book – the person of Christ. This, like point 7, is of such importance, I must develop it further. Important? It is paramount!

9. The person of Christ. The great casualty in the corruption of the New Testament system, about which I have been writing, is not church life, or men. Far from it. Most damage has been done to nothing less than the glory of the person of the Lord Christ himself. Really? Yes, indeed!

I can say what I mean in no better way than to answer the question I raised as the title to this book. *The Pastor: Does He Exist?* The answer is threefold: No, Yes and Yes. Let me explain.

The Pastor, as we find him in so many churches – does he exist in the Bible? No.

⁷ See my *Infant, Baptist Sacramentalism*.

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The pastor-teacher – does he exist? Yes; in the Bible, that is. In the churches, he should.

Above all, THE PASTOR – does he exist? He certainly does. The Lord is literally my Pastor (Ps. 23:1).

I am not trying to be clever with words. In the New Testament *poimēn* and *poimainō* are usually, rightly, translated *shepherd* or *to shepherd*. These two words are used many times in the New Testament, most frequently referring to the Lord Jesus. Jesus calls himself the good Shepherd (John 10:11,14). He is ‘that great Shepherd of the sheep’ (Heb. 13:20), ‘the Shepherd and Overseer of [the] souls’ of his people (1 Pet. 2:25). In five New Testament passages though, the words refer to gifted men in the church (John 21:16; Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 9:7; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:1-2), yes, but my point is that it is Christ who is the Lord who is my Shepherd.

So I say it again: I am not trying to be clever with words. Far from it. I could not be more serious. *This* is what my book has been all about. *The* grievous consequence of this pastor business, *the* grievous error in it, is not some technical point of church order and structure. Certainly not. No! Rather it is this: When men invent a third order of minister, when they invent the notion of *the pastor*, they are in fact – albeit unwittingly – fulfilling a basic instinct ingrained in fallen man; namely, the need of every sinner to find a priest to represent him before God, and a visible priest at that. The widespread existence of a priesthood is no accident.⁸ Men and women all over the world, in all sorts of cultures, in every culture, crave a priest. It takes various forms, but the craving is there.

Let me stick with Christendom. How rife is the need for a priest in Christendom! I say ‘need’, but throughout Christendom, men demand, crave, hanker after such an individual. Many think they need a priest for their babies as they enter the world, so that he, with his ministrations, can get these babies right with God, will give them their so-called Christian name by sprinkling drops of water on them, and muttering some hocus-pocus over them. Some of these babies as they grow up, take it further. They need a priest –

⁸ See the Introduction to my *Priesthood*. Idolatry is at the root (Rom. 1:18-25).

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or even a bishop – to confirm their spiritual status in some way or another, and bestow the Holy Spirit upon them through the laying on of his hands. They need a priest to administer the communion to them. They need a priest to make their marriage ‘proper’. They need a priest to offer them words of comfort when they pass through affliction. They need a priest to absolve them from their sins. They need a priest to tell them the words of God. Above all, they need a priest who will make sure that all is well at their death, and will ensure their safe and certain passage to the realms of bliss. Men hanker after a priest, I say; they crave the comforts of a professional minister and his religious ministrations. At all stages of life, they want a priest to perform the rites of passage for them.

Reader, do not make the mistake of thinking the above paragraph applies only to those churches which openly speak about having a priest. Far, far from it! Many believers and churches are guilty of it in some form or another – not excluding those who are most vehement in their dislike of the word ‘priest’. Of course, most dramatically is it seen in the Roman abomination, with its so-called Vicar of Christ, and his priestly legions. But, distressing to report, the principle is not only a feature of Popery. It is alive and kicking in the evangelical world. Oh, we may have jettisoned the gaudy trappings of medievalism, yes, but we have replaced them with our own Reformed and evangelical trappings and props, right enough!

My point is, by breaking Christ’s ordinances on this subject, evangelicals (including the Reformed) pander to this craving. Ordinary – what a dreadful word – ordinary believers,⁹ so they are told, are lay people; they really do need a member of the special class – one of the clerics – to lead and preside over their worship, to minister holy things to and for them.

And it is but a short step from this for the ordinary people to let their clerics ‘do’ their worship on their behalf. Ordinary Christians cannot be expected to learn directly from God’s word, can they? They need the professional expert, the man of God, the Lord’s servant, the Lord’s sent-servant, the Lord’s anointed to teach them,

⁹ I object to this notion of ‘ordinary’ but I cannot think of a way of avoiding it and yet making my meaning clear. All God’s people – all of them – are extraordinary, special and peculiar; ‘peculiar’ in the AV sense of Ex. 19:5; Deut. 14:2; 26:18; Ps. 135:4; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9.

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don't they? They need a professional minister to pray for them, not infrequently to pronounce (if not to bestow – but not, as it should be, to ask) God's blessing on them as they leave the meeting house. It is not unknown for Reformed or evangelical men to pronounce the aaronic benediction (Num. 6:24-26) upon a congregation at the close of a service, even with uplifted hands, palms facing the congregation – copying Aaron who addressed the people, not God, with this benediction (Num. 6:23). Do such men not fear they might be trespassing on Christ's prerogative (Luke 24:50)? Or, worse, are they aping him? No man today has this right or power. If 2 Corinthians 13:14 is thought to justify it – though it needs proof that Paul was not simply *praying* there – it was an *apostolic* blessing. Compare Romans 1:7; 15:13; 16:20,25-27; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 16:23; Galatians 1:3-5; 6:18, for example.

For many 'ordinary' believers, in their need, their professional pastor counsels them. In their ignorance, he guides them. In their sin, he intercedes for them. Nothing wrong with this, of course. Except... when the pastor takes the place of Christ. And, not infrequently, he does.¹⁰ Hackles will rise at this, but I say it again. For the 'ordinary' believer, too often the visible pastor is more real than the invisible Christ. Yet all these vital ministries belong to Christ. They are properly his, and only his. He is the Pastor of his people. But, once the human priest has got his feet under the table, he will eventually *replace* the Son of God. It is the age-old principle of the camel's nose.

Perhaps I should explain. An Arab was crossing the desert. When night came, he put up his tent and tied his camel to it. The temperature dropped, and the camel asked the Arab if he (the camel) could put just his nose in the tent – to warm it up. Just his nose. The Arab agreed that the camel could put his nose in, but only his nose, because the tent was small, and there was no room for the two of them. The temperature dropped. The camel asked the Arab if he (the camel) could just put his forelegs inside the tent, because they were very cold. The Arab reluctantly agreed that the camel could put his forelegs in, but no more. Later, the camel asked the

¹⁰ See my earlier illustration from the *Evangelical Times*. Notice I said the Pastor 'intercedes' for them in their sins. I hope it can be said he 'confronts' them in their sins.

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Arab if he could put his hind legs into the tent. If not, he wouldn't be able to make the journey the next morning – with frozen legs. So the Arab agreed. As a result, there was no room in the tent for the Arab, who found himself outside, freezing, while the camel was inside, snug.

The point I am trying to make is this. As the visible pastor is raised in our estimation, it is altogether too possible for the non-visible Christ to be lowered in our estimation.

I realise that most evangelicals, especially the Reformed, will be up in arms at my words; they cherish no such idea when they talk about their pastor! Perhaps not. But, as I have said, it is there all the same, deep in the psyche. It is in us all. Priestcraft is endemic. It fulfils an almost universal demand, in both its blatant and surreptitious forms. And this is why the subject I have addressed is important and of large consequence. The invented 'pastor' can so easily become a priest by another name. Ultimately, the pastor notion is an attack upon Christ himself. In the end, for more than would admit it, the pastor becomes the priest who supplants Christ. I have given plenty of evidence of it in the previous pages.

In defence of this unbiblical practice, men cite history and tradition, illustrating their point by examples such as the captain of a ship, the driver of a car. In so doing, they give themselves away. This, in itself, tells us men really do want *a man* in charge. Christ is King, says the Statement of Faith. All the same, we want a visible king. My point is this: Tradition may say such and such, but what does the Scripture say? And what about this 'tradition'? Ask any experienced believer who has lived through several pastorates. Does not experience teach us that in many cases the one-man system has failed miserably? Since it is fundamentally unscriptural, must it not of necessity be so? Indeed, does not Scripture warn us of it? Have I not given enough examples? More than that, in this invented system, notice the heavy reliance upon *man*. Is the *ultimate* responsibility for church life in the hands of a *man*? The New Testament tells us that Christ is the King and head of his church, its leader. Men whistle in the dark when they try to claim that following history and tradition does not diminish the headship of Christ. Even though pastors often speak of themselves as 'under-shepherds', it will not wash. The stable door is being shut when the

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horse has scarpered! This pastor business, with its emphasis upon man, *does* diminish Christ in the local church, and in the life of the individual believer. This is precisely its greatest curse.

It is not for nothing that the New Testament makes a big issue of the priesthood of Christ. He and he only is the true Minister. I realise the New Testament contrasts the true ministry of Christ with the shadowy ministry of Aaron and his descendants, and not with that of pastorism. I agree. But the explanation is simplicity itself. The New Testament could not warn the churches about the dangers of pastorism. Why not? Because it knows nothing of it – it was invented by the Fathers. And where did *they* go to find him? The old covenant! They went to the levitical priesthood. Cyprian did it. Calvin and the other Reformers carried it on. And so today. Does the pastor (as we know him today) exist? In the New Testament, he does not! It was the Fathers, drawing on old covenant ideas, who invented a priestly class in the church by elevating the bishop above the elders. In so doing, they were, in effect, elbowing Christ off his throne. Christ is the Shepherd and Overseer, the Pastor and Bishop of his people (1 Pet. 2:25).

And the letter to the Hebrews really does strike at the root, not only of the aaronic priesthood, but also of pastorism – for the fact is, hankering after the aaronic priesthood lies at the root of pastorism. But Aaron's priesthood has been abolished. It was fulfilled, and consequently abolished, by Christ. Sadly, many churches will persist in reinstating essential elements of it in one form or another, especially in the one-man pastor. And in so doing, they undermine Christ and his finished work.

And, as I say, *this is the climax of the debate*. It is the person, status and work of Christ which, ultimately, are at stake. Christ is our only priest. Indeed, he is our great high priest who has passed through the heavens for us (Heb. 4:14-15; 6:19-20). Alas, men want to look to a visible man in addition to Christ – whom we have not seen (1 Pet. 1:8). Earlier in this chapter, I quoted Warkentin, but only partially. Let me complete the quote: 'The creation of a privileged class of believers presents a danger to the priesthood of all believers *and to the mediatorship of Christ*'. Let me re-quote my main epigraph from Calvin: 'Whatever men ascribe to themselves is taken away from the Lord'. And Ryle: 'Human nature would

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always rather lean on a visible minister, than an invisible Christ'.¹¹ I agree with all three.¹²

Let it sound loud and clear: We need no man to intercede for us.¹³ No man! Christ does it perfectly (Heb. 7:25). Every other man – however and by whoever he has been ordained, set apart, called, appointed, inducted, sent out, installed or recognised as a pastor – is still a sinner like ourselves. But Christ is separate from sinners. He never needed to offer for his own sins (Heb. 7:26-27). Who wants a man as priest – a man who is weak, a man who is as much a sinner as we are – when we have Christ, the one who is made perfect for ever (Heb. 7:28). As the writer to the Hebrews said: 'The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest' (Heb. 8:1). Note it well reader – it is the point, the *main* point (NKJV). And it is always under attack.

'We don't entertain any such notion of our "pastor". We don't think he supplants Christ. It's nonsense to suggest it. Worse, it's offensive!' Oh?

Take that eccentric episode in most Lord's day services – the notices: How frequently a visiting preacher is welcomed as God's servant. How rarely (if ever) is an ordinary visitor welcomed in this way. If it is objected that the one giving the notices does not know every visitor, and therefore cannot know if they are true believers – very well! How about applying that principle to the inviting of visitors to join in hymns or other responses which only true believers can sincerely take part in? Again, consider this frequent question: 'Who's your minister now?' And what about: 'Who's your pastor these days?' 'Unfortunately, we're without a minister at present. We're on the lookout for one'.¹⁴ Is it not shocking?

¹¹ Warkentin p181, emphasis mine; Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.22 Part 2 p146; Ryle: *Matthew* p300.

¹² Those who question Ryle's assertion, need to explain the episode of the golden calf (Ex. 32), and why so many of the prophets were iconoclasts (just look up 'idols' in a concordance). An idol need not be made of gold, remember!

¹³ I am not, of course, decrying intercessory prayer for a fellow-believer, based on Christ's intercession. I hope my distinction is clear.

¹⁴ Very early on, I said: 'I certainly hope churches are praying for, and on the lookout for, able teachers'. *One* of the differences between that and the above lies in the use of the plural and the singular.

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Christian, we have a minister. We have THE MINISTER. What is his name? The Lord Jesus Christ. Where does he carry out his ministry? In our little churches? In our meeting houses? Not at all! ‘We have... a minister of [in, NIV] the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord erected, and not man’ (Heb. 8:1-2, NKJV). Christ exercises his pastorate in heaven for us. Christ ‘is the only pastor’, said Calvin.¹⁵ ‘Christ is all’ (Col. 3:11).

Calvin went on: ‘But yet he admits many pastors under him, provided that he holds pre-eminence over them all, and that by them he alone govern[s] the church’. If I could change the word ‘pastor’ to ‘elder’, I would agree wholeheartedly with Calvin. Nothing I am saying here should in any way be taken as an attack upon the settled rule and care and instruction of the church. I keep stressing it in the hope that in the midst of heated reaction to my words, this vital point might not be lost.

Nevertheless, I can hear the protesting howls: ‘But all this is a man of straw!’ I disagree. ‘Well, I don’t think of my pastor like this. It’s utterly ridiculous to suggest it’. Perhaps so. Yet, using the word properly, as God has made it known in Scripture – speaking of Christ – this is precisely how believers should think and talk about their pastor. But all too often believers speak about ‘their pastor’ in ways which would be better reserved for Christ. Indeed they should only be applied to Christ. For instance, as I have already mentioned, the period between the end of one pastorate and the start of another is usually called the *interregnum*. What regnum? Regnum? Who is the King of the church? Christ is – or so the vast majority of Confessions say. ‘King of my life, I crown thee now’. Christ reigns as the king-priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 6:20; 7:1-28; 8:1-2; 10:12-13), doesn’t he? Is he not ‘far above all rule and authority’, ‘head over everything for the church’ (Eph. 1:21-22)? *Head over everything!* How dare Christians talk about a mere man reigning over the church! This is what *regnum* means! Christ is King. The prophets repeatedly foretold his kingship over an increasing and endless kingdom (Ps. 2; 89:35-37; Isa. 9:7; 16:5; Dan. 2:44; 7:14,18,27; Zech. 9:9-10; and so on). The New Testament declares it (Matt. 21:1-11; 28:18-20; Luke 1:31-33;

¹⁵ Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.17 Part 1 p79.

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19:37-40; 23:2-3; Acts 17:7). There is never any interregnum in the church. Christ is always King. He will never be replaced. It is utterly wrong to speak in terms that make a mere man to be king of the church.

‘Well, I don’t mean anything like that when I use it’. Oh? So what *do* you mean? Words have meanings – let us use them according to their received meaning, and we shall all be clear. Tell us what *you* mean. This takes us back to Humpty Dumpty. What if he gets to work on, say, the atonement? What if a preacher preaches salvation from sin by faith in the Christ who shed his blood as a propitiation, but says he does not use the words in the way the Bible does? Would that matter? Would it matter – *to you*?

And in all this pastor business, what about the real question: Where is Christ?

Let me spell it out. I most definitely believe in having a pastor. I go further. Unless I have a pastor I am not saved. And every true believer can be thankful to say: By God’s grace I have one. His name is the Lord Jesus Christ, ‘the good Shepherd’ (John 10:11,14). ‘The LORD is my Shepherd’ (Ps. 23:1). He is ever pastoring me; he is always serving for me in the true tabernacle – the heavenly tabernacle – in the presence of God. And he truly does belong to a separate and special class. He is unique. He is ‘holy, blameless, pure, set apart [separate, NKJV] from sinners’ (Heb. 7:26). He is the true and only cleric. He is my representative before God. He is worthy of every title which heaven can bestow upon him. One day, not only heaven will acknowledge him. When Christ Jesus the Lord shall come in judgement, and call all men – the living and the dead – to appear before him, then every knee will bow, whether in heaven, earth or under the earth, and all will confess him to be Lord to the Father’s glory (Phil. 2:10-11). God his Father has already ‘exalted him to the highest place and [given] him the name that is above every name’ (Phil. 2:9), and one day all creation shall own it, to his everlasting praise.

Away, therefore, with every poor imitation and rival. I want no vicar. I need no substitute pastor for my soul. Give me Christ and Christ only. ‘Give me Christ or else I die’. Give me Christ, give me only Christ, and I live, I live for ever.